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J. "Heavy Was Their Loss:
at Gettysburg." *Gettysburg*
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CAVALRY DIVISION:

(6,629 MEN / 17 GUNS)

MAJOR GENERAL JAMES EWELL BROWN STUART

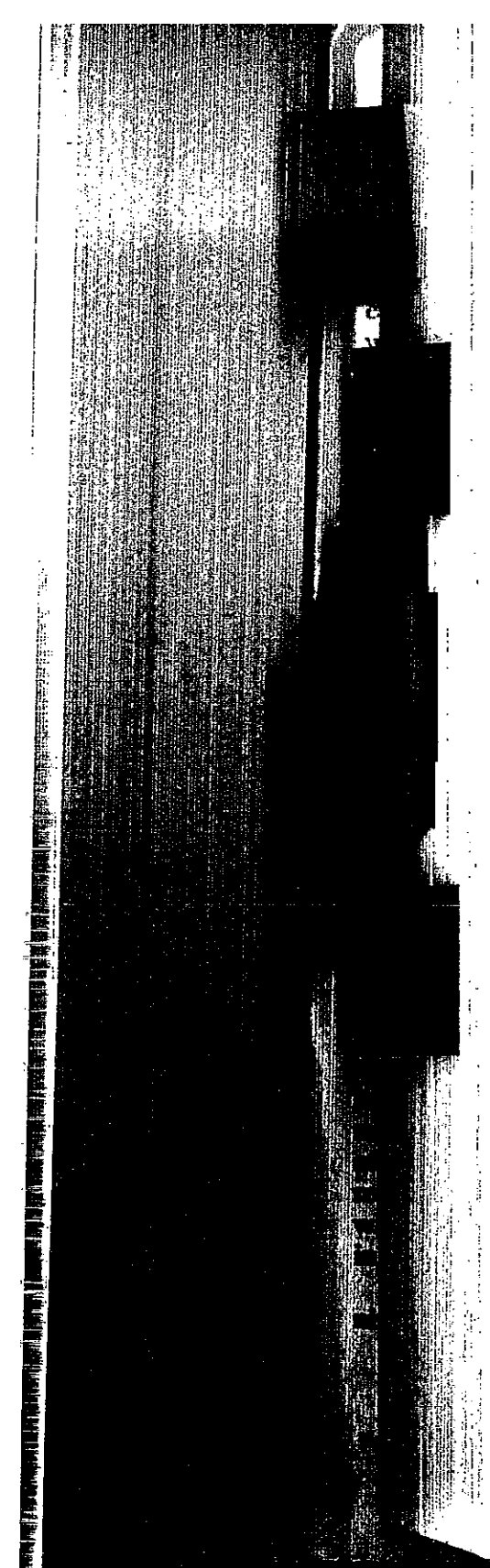
In 1865, the *Army and Navy Journal*, the nation's leading military journal, examined the phenomenon of cavalry leadership and concluded that "the nature of cavalry service makes their commanders' presence a necessity, as in all formations for attack they lead their columns. They are supposed to possess those rare personal qualities that impart inspiration of invincibility to the squadrons they lead, and magnetize with individual daring each trooper." The South found such a man early on in the person of James Ewell Brown "Jeb" Stuart, the most famous cavalryman of the Civil War.

By mid-1863, Stuart was only thirty years old, and he had already performed two years of heroics with the spirit of a character out of a Sir Walter Scott novel. For him more than any Confederate general, notions of knightly chivalry influenced his approach to leadership. His eagerness to project himself as a Knight of the Round Table transcended the typical mid-nineteenth century Southern infatuation with such images, and may have been fueled by Stuart's belief that he descended from the warlike Stuart kings of Scotland.

The "Beau Sabreur of the Confederacy," as he was called, was square-built and of average height, with an aggressive physical nature. He had china-blue eyes, and rough-hewn features which prompted his West Point classmates to jokingly call him "Beauty." He attempted to hide his receding chin with a bushy cinnamon beard. The flamboyant trooper often wore a scarlet-lined cape that covered his tunic, a soft hat with the brim pinned up on one side by a gold star supporting a foot-long ostrich plume, elbow-length gauntlets and thigh-high boots, flowers and ribbons in his lapels, yellow sash, and golden spurs. Along with the banjo pickers and fiddlers which provided his headquarters music, Stuart's affectations incurred ridicule from some (mostly infantrymen), while others wrote them off as tasteless frivolities.

The same cavalier spirit that informed his taste in apparel applied to his combat style, for he was a reckless adventurist who loved attention and played shamelessly to the newsmen and image makers. There was a shrewd rationale behind the whole business, however, for as Stuart observed, "if we oppose force to force we cannot win, for their resources are greater than ours. We must substitute esprit for numbers. Therefore I strive to inculcate in my men the spirit of the chase."

Friendly and approachable, Stuart's horsemen gladly followed him on forays and raids. One trooper remarked that "a franker, more transparent nature, it is impossible to conceive." Artillerist Maj. James Dearing regarded Stuart as "decidedly one of the very best officers we have. . .and is generally looked upon with much confidence." As to Stuart's personal habits, Dearing observed: "he neither drinks nor smokes and is the plainest, most straightforward, best humored man in the world."



Stuart's aide John Cooke wrote that he was "ardent, impetuous, brimming over with the wine of life and of rippling flags, of martial music, and the clash of sabres." Another described Stuart as "a remarkable mixture of a green, boyish, undeveloped man, and a shrewd man of business and a strong leader."

Son of a prominent Virginia politician who had been an officer in the War of 1812, Stuart inherited his love of the limelight from his father. His mother's most obvious legacy was his lifelong religious devoutness. When he attended West Point, he was known as a "Bible class man." After graduating in the top third of the Academy's Class of 1854, he campaigned against the Comanches (where he survived an Indian bullet fired into his chest at point blank range) and served in Bloody Kansas. In 1859, Stuart accompanied the force led by Robert E. Lee to crush the John Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry. Stuart wed the daughter of prominent cavalryman Philip St. George Cooke in 1855, but in April 1861 resigned from the army to join the Confederacy; his father-in-law stayed with the Union.

Stuart's served in the first months of the Civil War with the 1st Virginia Cavalry, containing the advance of a Union army in the lower Shenandoah Valley. The regiment then helped pursue and panic the Union army after First Manassas, and Stuart gained a promotion to brigadier general in September 1861. He received command of the army's Cavalry Brigade the next month, and during the winter of 1861-62, acquired a reputation as the finest reconnaissance leader in Virginia (he performed most of his scouting either alone or with a few select troopers). In mid-June 1862, as the Confederate army dug in around Richmond against Maj. Gen. George McClellan's Army of the Potomac, Stuart set out with some 1,000 cavalrymen and for the next three days made a complete circuit of McClellan's army, gathering facts about Union dispositions—especially those along the Chickahominy River. More than any other exploit, this "Chickahominy Raid" made Stuart's reputation. Even the North marveled at this accomplishment, the *New York Times* observing that it "excites as much admiration in the Union army as it does in Richmond. . . . we regard it as a feather of the very tallest sort in the rebel cap." Stuart was quickly promoted to major general and given command of the newly formed two brigade Cavalry Division.

Less than two months later in the Second Manassas Campaign, Stuart crept around Maj. Gen. John Pope's northern flank and struck his supply base at Catlett's Station on the Orange & Alexandria Railroad, capturing 300 men and such rare booty as Pope's dress uniform. In the September Maryland Campaign, the cavalier rode around McClellan a second time, and after the Battle of Fredericksburg in December, raided to within a few miles of Washington, where he tweaked the nose of Union Quartermaster Montgomery Meigs, wiring him on his own telegraph to complain about the "bad quality of the mules lately furnished, which interfered seriously with our moving the captured wagons."

During the Chancellorsville Campaign in May 1863, Stuart stealthily located the exposed Union right flank, then screened Lt. Gen. Thomas "Stonewall" Jackson's attacking column while it marched into position to crush the Federal Eleventh Corps. When Jackson was mortally wounded following the attack, Stuart stepped in and competently directed Stonewall's infantry, consolidating gains and helping to ensure victory. His actions at the head of Jackson's men received elaborate praise from Gen. Robert E. Lee and Maj. Gen. A. P. Hill. By the summer of 1863, Stuart had earned a reputation built not only on extravagance but on effective leadership. The myths that surrounded Jeb and his legion of cavaliers further increased the odds in their favor by tearing at the psyche of the Union cavalrymen.

A blot was placed on Stuart's record, however, in the June 9, 1863, fight at Brandy Station. There, Stuart and his cavalrymen were surprised by a large-scale Federal cavalry offensive and spent much of the day scramblingto hold the field. The

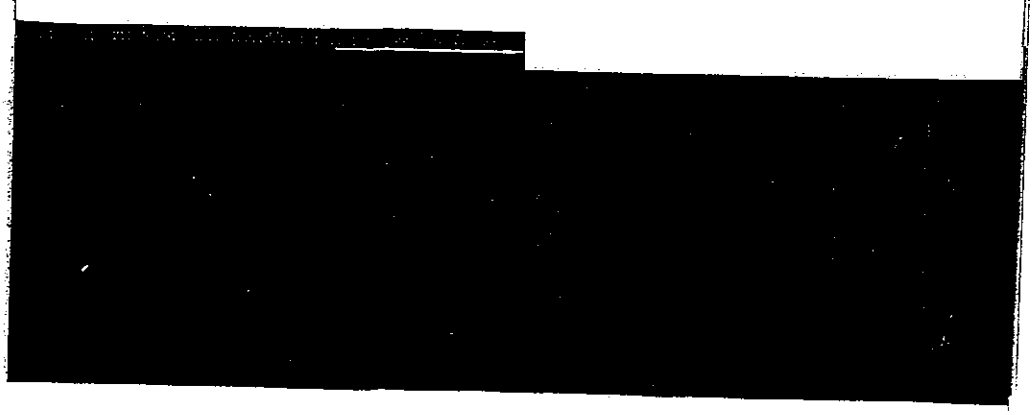
battle was the largest cavalry fight ever conducted on the American continent, and ended as a tactical draw. The engagement signaled the rise of the Union cavalry, which from that moment on was recognized as a potent force deserving of respect. Stuart was derided in all the Richmond papers. The story went around that the surprise had occurred because Stuart and his officers were "rollicking, frolicking and running after girls" at a ball the night before.

Stuart was mortified by the press coverage and negative whispers about his performance. With the Gettysburg Campaign already underway he resolved to vindicate himself—a circumstance which may have multiplied his natural impetuosity. As the army snaked northward, Stuart fought a series of engagements at Aldie, Middleburg and Upperville (June 19-21) while screening and holding back prying enemy cavalry. The next day, June 22, Lee issued orders to Stuart to probe and harass the enemy infantry, guard the army's right flank, gather supplies, and remain in communication. On June 25, Stuart moved out with three brigades in an attempt to restore luster to his reputation by once more circling the enemy army altogether. While Lee intended that Stuart find and screen Richard Ewell's Second Corps flank in Pennsylvania and send reconnaissance information to army headquarters, his cavalier found this impossible to do during the last week of June through much of July 2. His ride behind the Union army, which was pushing north ahead of Stuart, cut him off from Lee. Stuart's absence left the commander strapped for horsemen—although Lee still had cavalry other than Stuart to call upon. Stuart's ride, however, was based upon discretionary orders from Lee himself, which allowed him to undertake it. As historian Edwin Cottington wrote, "if orders or suggestions are conditional, the conditions upon which they are based, should be made clear. Lee's orders to Stuart did not meet this standard." Jeb Stuart's role in the campaign is one of the most contentious issues surrounding the entire event.

GETTYSBURG: After crossing the Potomac on June 28, Stuart's Division headed northward, keeping to the east of the Army of the Potomac. Near Rockville, Maryland, Stuart captured 125 wagons, which ultimately slowed him even more. His troopers rode all night toward Pennsylvania, strapped now with wheeled vehicles and captives.

Early on July 1, as A. P. Hill's leading division was moving toward its confrontation with John Reynolds' First Corps at Gettysburg, Stuart's troopers cantered north into Dover, about 23 air miles northeast of Gettysburg. There, he let his exhausted men climb off their horses and get some sleep—their first rest since the Potomac crossing. Scouts fanned out in the hope that one would locate the army. After about four hours, Stuart roused his men and headed northwest toward Carlisle, where he expected to find provisions and perhaps part of Ewell's Corps. After an exhausting ride, Stuart's men found the town occupied by stubborn Pennsylvania militia. Stuart stood by the rest of that day while Brig. Gen. Fitz Lee's horse artillery tried vainly to shell the garrison into submission. About 1:00 a.m. on July 2, one of Stuart's couriers galloped up with the stunning information that the Army of Northern Virginia was heavily engaged at Gettysburg, 25 miles to the south. With that critical information finally in hand, Stuart gave the command, and the cavalry—Fitz Lee's, then Col. John Chambliss', and Brig. Gen. Wade Hampton's brigades—headed toward the fight.

About noon on July 2, Stuart finally found Lee's headquarters on the Chambersburg Pike about a mile west of town. He dismounted, saluted his commander and reported the arrival of his raiding party—over sixty hours late. There are no lack of stories as to exactly what transpired when the two generals came face to face during the middle of the battle. With Stuart standing in front of him, Lee at first rebuked him with a cold silence. According to one credible account, the general greeted him with a question: "General Stuart, where have you been?" When Stuart attempted a reply, Lee cut him short: "I have not heard a word



from you for days, and you the eyes and ears of my army!" Stuart must have grimaced at the stinging remark. Lee almost never criticized his subordinates, and when he did he needed few words to produce stinging shame.

Lee regained his calm demeanor, and began to work out a new plan for Stuart's men. Earlier that morning, Hampton had driven off Brig. Gen. Judson Kilpatrick's troopers near Hunterstown, five miles northeast of Gettysburg. Lee saw an opportunity for his horsemen to move toward this locale and then sweep down on the rear of the Union army. On the morning of July 3, Stuart rode quietly out the York Pike with his three brigades, plus that of Brig. Gen. Albert Jenkins. At about 10:00 a.m., the column reached a point on the Pike two and one-half miles northeast of Gettysburg, then turned south onto a farm road. Their progress had been spotted by enemy scouts, and two brigades of Federal troopers were marched out the Hanover Road to block any attempt against the Union army's rear. Another setback occurred when it was found that Jenkins' brigade had not brought enough ammunition and it had to retire from the field earlier than desired.

At about 3:00 p.m., as Pickett's men were stepping off to assault Cemetery Ridge, another sizeable cavalry action began. There were charges and countercharges, and both sides claimed a victory. One Confederate sergeant probably came closest to the truth when he declared it a "draw." The engagement resulted in nothing worthwhile for the Confederates and succeeded only in producing a substantial number of casualties.

Stuart wrote the longest Southern report of the Gettysburg Campaign, arguing that the havoc caused to enemy communications and supply by his raid validated the delay in joining Lee. Stuart further argued pointlessly (and gracelessly) that Lee's army, in particular Maj. Gen. Jubal Early's Division, was not where it was supposed to be. He pointed disingenuously to the fact that Lee had Jenkins' Brigade on hand for reconnaissance, but everyone was aware of Jenkins' shortcomings in that regard. Over the years Stuart's late arrival became one of the accepted explanations for Lee's defeat in Pennsylvania. With Stuart on hand, say critics, General Heth would have known the composition of the Federal force in his path on the morning of July 1, and pushed boldly into the town. Or, Lee would have known of the enemy's concentration and been less eager to engage in frontal attacks and more disposed to slip nimbly around the Union left. One thing seems clear: Stuart made extravagant use of the discretion afforded him by Lee, and Lee's orders allowed him that discretion.

Stuart's status at the head of Confederate cavalry was never threatened. He supervised a reorganization of the mounted arm into a corps in September 1863 (but was never promoted to lieutenant general, an appropriate corps rank). The next spring, as Stuart battled Federal cavalry at Yellow Tavern outside Richmond, a pistol shot struck him in the abdomen. The mortally wounded Confederate horseman died twenty-seven hours later, on May 12, 1864.

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